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8 IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
9 EASTERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

10 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
11
12 Plaintiff,
13
14 v.
15 JOE MORRIS THOMPSON,
16 Defendant.

CASE NO. 2:20-CR-00222-KJM

STIPULATION REGARDING USE OF
VIDEOCONFERENCING DURING DISPOSITION
HEARING; FINDINGS AND ORDER

DATE: 01/11/2021
TIME: 9:00 a.m.
COURT: Hon. Kimberly J. Mueller

16 **BACKGROUND**

17 This matter is before the Court for sentencing on a supervised release violation.

18 On March 27, 2020, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
19 (“CARES Act”). The CARES Act empowered the Judicial Conference of the United States and Chief
20 District Judges to authorize plea and sentencing hearings by video or telephonic conference when 1)
21 such hearings “cannot be conducted in person without seriously jeopardizing public health and safety;”
22 and 2) “the district judge in a particular case finds for specific reasons that the plea or sentencing in that
23 case cannot be further delayed without serious harm to the interests of justice.” *Id.*, Pub. L. 116-23
24 § 15002(b)(2).

25 On March 29, 2020, the Judicial Conference of the United States made the findings required by
26 the CARES Act, concluding that “emergency conditions due to the national emergency declared by the
27 President under the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. § 1601, et seq.) with respect to the
28 Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) have materially affected and will materially affect the

1 functioning of the federal courts generally.”

2 On January 4, 2021, Your Honor, per General Order 628, also made the findings required by the
3 CARES Act: “[F]elony pleas under Rule 11 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure and felony
4 sentencings under Rule 32 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure cannot be conducted in person
5 without seriously jeopardizing public health and safety.” Accordingly, the findings of the Judicial
6 Conference and General Order 628 continued to establish that plea and sentencing hearings cannot take
7 safely take place in person.

8 In order to authorize plea or sentencing hearings by remote means, however, the CARES Act—
9 as implemented by General Order 628—also requires district courts in individual cases to “find, for
10 specific reasons, that felony pleas or sentencings in that case cannot be further delayed without serious
11 harm to the interests of justice” General Order 628 further requires that the defendant consent to
12 remote proceedings. Finally, the remote proceeding must be conducted by videoconference unless
13 “videoconferencing is not reasonably available.” In such cases, district courts may conduct hearings by
14 teleconference.

15 The parties hereby stipulate and agree that each of the requirements of the CARES Act and
16 General Order 628 have been satisfied in this case. They request that the Court enter an order making
17 the specific findings required by the CARES Act and General Order 628. Specifically, for the reasons
18 further set forth below, the parties agree that:

19 1) The disposition hearing in this case cannot be further delayed without serious harm to the
20 interest of justice, given the public health restrictions on physical contact and court closures existing in
21 the Eastern District of California; and

22 2) The defendant waives his physical presence at the hearing and consents to remote hearing
23 by videoconference and counsel joins in that waiver.

24 **STIPULATION**

25 Plaintiff United States of America, by and through its counsel of record, and defendant, by and
26 through defendant’s counsel of record, hereby stipulate as follows:

27 1. The Governor of the State of California declared a Proclamation of a State of Emergency
28 to exist in California on March 4, 2020.

1 2. On March 13, 2020, the President of the United States issued a proclamation declaring a
2 National Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3 3. In their continuing guidance, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and
4 other public health authorities have suggested the public avoid social gatherings in groups of more than
5 10 people and practice physical distancing (within about six feet) between individuals to potentially
6 slow the spread of COVID-19. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person contact,
7 and no vaccine currently exists.

8 4. These social distancing guidelines – which are essential to combatting the virus – are
9 generally not compatible with holding in-person court hearings.

10 5. On March 17, 2020, this Court issued General Order 611, noting the President and
11 Governor of California’s emergency declarations and CDC guidance, and indicating that public health
12 authorities within the Eastern District had taken measures to limit the size of gatherings and practice
13 social distancing. The Order suspended all jury trials in the Eastern District of California scheduled to
14 commence before May 1, 2020.

15 6. On March 18, 2020, General Order 612 issued. The Order closed each of the courthouses
16 in the Eastern District of California to the public. It further authorized assigned district court judges to
17 continue criminal matters after May 1, 2020 and excluded time under the Speedy Trial Act. General
18 Order 612 incorporated General Order 611’s findings regarding the health dangers posed by the
19 pandemic.

20 7. On April 16, 2020, the Judicial Council of the Ninth Circuit declared a judicial
21 emergency in this District pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 3174(d), based on the District’s “critically low
22 resources across its heavy caseload.” The report accompanying the Judicial Council’s declaration
23 analyzed the public safety dangers associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and examined both the
24 District’s caseload (the District currently ranks first in the Ninth Circuit and eighth nationally in
25 weighted filings) and its shortage of judicial resources (the District is currently authorized only six
26 district judges; two of those positions are currently vacant and without nominations). The report further
27 explained that a backlog of cases exists that “can only start to be alleviated” when the CDC lifts its
28 guidance regarding gatherings of individuals.

8. On April 17, 2020, General Order 617 issued, continuing court closures through June 1, 2020 and authorizing further continuances of hearings and exclusions under the Speedy Trial Act.

9. On May 13, 2020, General Order 618 issued, continuing court closures until further notice and authorizing further continuances of hearings and exclusions under the Speedy Trial Act.

10. On June 29, 2020, this Court issued General Order 620, finding that felony pleas could not be conducted in person without seriously jeopardizing public health and safety.

11. On September 30, 2020, this Court issued General Order 624, finding that felony pleas still could not be conducted in person without seriously jeopardizing public health and safety.

12. On January 4, 2021, this Court issued General Order 628, finding that felony pleas still could not be conducted in person without seriously jeopardizing public health and safety.

13. Given these facts, it is essential that Judges in this District resolve as many matters as possible via videoconference and teleconference during the COVID-19 pandemic. By holding these hearings now, this District will be in a better position to work through the backlog of criminal and civil matters once in-person hearings resume.

14. The disposition hearing in this case accordingly cannot be further delayed without serious harm to the interests of justice. If the Court were to delay this hearing until it can be held in-person, it would only add to the enormous backlog of criminal and civil matters facing this Court, and every Judge in this District, when normal operations resume.

15. Under CARES Act § 15002(b), defendant consents to proceed with this hearing by video-teleconference. Counsel joins in this consent.

IT IS SO STIPULATED.

Dated: January 6, 2021

McGREGOR W. SCOTT
United States Attorney

/s/ ALEXIS NELSEN
ALEXIS NELSEN
Assistant United States Attorney

Dated: January 6, 2021

/s/ RACHELLE BARBOUR
RACHELLE BARBOUR
Counsel for Defendant
JOE MORRIS THOMPSON

FINDINGS AND ORDER

1. The Court adopts the findings above.

2. Further, the Court specifically finds that:

a) The disposition hearing in this case cannot be further delayed without serious harm to the interest of justice; and

b) The defendant has waived his physical presence at the hearing and consents to remote hearing by videoconference.

3. Therefore, based on the findings above, and under the Court's authority under § 15002(b) of the CARES Act and General Order 628, the hearing in this case will be conducted by videoconference.

IT IS SO FOUND AND ORDERED this 8th day of January, 2021.


CHIEF UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE